

2 Roman Catholicism



A Message from Martin Luther

The papacy is just as useful to the church as the fifth wheel on a wagon. It is, in fact, entirely harmful. (*What Luther Says* § 3194)

Opening Prayer

L: There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

P: Who gave Himself as a ransom for all. (1 Peter 2:5–6)

L: Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace,

P: That we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

L: Open our eyes, O Lord, that we may behold wondrous things out of Your Word.

P: Amen!

The Word

The papacy builds on the assumption that the Bible is a dark book, and that special insight is needed to understand it. What do the following Bible passages have to say about God's Word, the Bible?

Psalm 119:105

2 Peter 1:16–19

Do the preceding Bible passages mean that people should not have a pastor or shepherd to guide them? What is the benefit of the Office of the Ministry if everyone can read the Bible for himself or herself? Compare **Romans 10:14–17**; **1 Corinthians 4:1–4**; and **Ephesians 4:11–14** in guiding your answer.

What is Jesus speaking about in **Matthew 23:9**?

Confession

What do the following Bible verses say about our ability to know, much less confess, every one of our sins?

Psalm 19:12

Psalm 40:12

Matthew 6:12

Romans 8:26

What do you think of the Roman teaching that you must “make amends” for the sins you commit against others? Is there anything about this teaching that is good and beneficial? What are the dangers of this teaching? Use **Luke 19:1–10**; **Romans 13:1–7**; and **1 John 2:2** for guidance in your discussion.

In what way is the Lutheran practice of confession and absolution different from the Roman practice of confession and satisfaction?

Purgatory

In what way does Rome's false teaching of purgatory take away your certainty and replace it with fear?

Church Body



The Roman Catholic Church

History

The Roman Catholic Church traces its founding to Matthew 16:13–20, where Jesus tells Peter, “I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church. . . . I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” Church tradition teaches that Peter became the first

bishop of the Church in Rome. In 330, the Roman emperor Constantine moved the center of the empire to Byzantium, naming it Constantinople in honor of himself. Constantine and succeeding emperors used the power of the Church to further their own rule, thus blurring the line between church and state even further. The congregation in Rome became the most powerful in the western part of the empire. The bishop of the Church in Rome was called “pope” after the Latin word for “father.” Today’s popes claim an unbroken line of succession back to Peter.

Vital Statistics

The Roman Catholic Church is the largest church body in America with more than 69 million members. The Roman Catholic Church is highly structured, with the sole “headquarters” based within the city-state of Vatican City in Rome. Sources: www.vatican.va; www.usccb.org.

Source of Doctrine

Rome bases its doctrine on the Scriptures (including the deuterocanonical books) and oral tradition as preserved in ancient writings. The church has the authority to establish doctrine through either churchwide ecumenical councils or the teachings/writings of the pope himself.

Role of Christ/Way of Salvation

Roman Catholics teach that at Baptism God gives sinners a saving righteousness they can use to help themselves in the face of God’s

judgment. Saving righteousness is made evident and increased by doing good works to merit more and more grace and eternal life.

Rome also teaches that while forgiveness of sin is granted because of Christ’s suffering and death, sinners still make amends to the majesty of God offended by sin through acts of penance.

Sacraments

The Roman Catholic Church observes seven sacraments. Like Lutherans, Catholics celebrate Baptism and Holy Communion (Eucharist). Baptism is generally performed on infants, granting forgiveness to the recipient. The Eucharist (Holy Communion) also contains the real presence, but Rome teaches that the bread and wine are transformed in their very substance into body and blood. In addition, Roman Catholics celebrate confirmation as the sacrament in which the Holy Spirit is bestowed on the believer. Penance gives remission of guilt and punishment through specific acts of contrition, confession, and satisfaction for sin. These can involve prayer, the Mass, fasting, merciful acts, and others as assigned by the priest. Matrimony honors the divine institution of marriage, declaring marriages performed outside of the church invalid. Holy orders is the sacrament celebrated only by individuals at their ordination into the service of the church. Anointing of the sick involves prayers and anointing with holy oils for the seriously ill.

Lutheran Response

Roman Catholics confess Jesus Christ as the way to salvation. When you talk to members of the Catholic Church, begin with statements that encompass the common elements of our faith. Avoid temptations to compromise biblical teaching just for the sake of fellowship. Not all Roman Catholics will necessarily believe all the official teachings of the church concerning individual doctrines. Use Scripture as your source when addressing areas of difference between Lutherans and Catholics.